

*The Condition of Man's Life a constant  
Call to Industry.*

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94.

A  
S E R M O N

Preached before the  
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,  
At St. MARY's CHURCH,

On Sunday, June 19. 1757.

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## JOHN IX. 4.

*I must work the Works of Him that sent me, while it is Day: The Night cometh, when no Man can work.*

“**W**HAT is the Cause, that the former Days were better than These?” was long ago censured as an *unwise Enquiry*: And

I will not say, that there would be at present either more Pertinency in the same Question, or more Justice in the Complaint implied in it. Yet, how rash soever it might be, to pronounce peremptorily concerning the comparative Goodness of different Ages or Countries upon the Whole; We shall, I presume, in view of their prevailing Modes of Thinking or Acting, find Room enough for distinguishing them from each other. And, to bring this Reflection nearer to ourselves; If our own Age and Country may, (as I hope it justly may,) claim some Advantage on Account of the fashionable Exertion of a few really amiable Qualities; Its proper Character, I fear, will be found yet more strongly marked by others of a less reputable Kind: Such as, a Love of Ease, and Fondness for sensual Pleasure; an Aversion from serious Thought, and Impatience of almost any useful Employment.



A Taste this, which hath for some Time been spreading, not among the gay and sprightly alone, but even among the grave and sedentary (I had almost said, the studious) Part of the Nation. For otherwise, whence comes it, that the Writers of the Times so generally find it expedient to accommodate to *This* not only the Entertainment, but the Instruction, they are pleased to provide for us? In Fact, Diversion is become at least one principal Business, and Skill therein an important Branch of Science, in our Days. A general Relaxation in Principle hath been gradually introducing a proportionable Carelessness in Practice: "Till, from a sceptical Unconcern about the future, We are but too naturally sunk into a most unmanly Self-Indulgence for the present. "*What We shall do in the End "hereof,"* is a serious Enquiry; and would deserve to be as seriously considered, were it not already too probably resolved; by Wretchedness, Disorders; and Tumults in the Country; by Decay, Murmurings, and Complaining in the City; by unsuccessful Enterprizes and other mortifying Occurrences abroad; I wish we could not add, by (Those constant Concomitants of expensive Pleasures) Corruption, Greediness of Gain, and Want of Feeling for the Publick, almost every-where at home. But, leaving Effects of this Sort to be estimated by Others; it may concern *Us* to consider, What might be the Consequences of indulging a like trifling, indolent, luxurious Humour in Places of Education, and even among *the Sons of the Prophets*. Now, *Wisdom*



*dom* is not born with any of us ; nor is it to be acquired, where it most abounds, without attentive Observation, and painful *Search for it as for hid Treasure* : And, if, from a general Disuse of such necessary Means of Improvement, *These Lights that are among Us* should become *Darkness*, how great must be that *Darkness* ! If, instead of aspiring after Skill in ancient Languages, and Acquaintance with ancient Customs ; after Readiness in the Art of right Reasoning, and Acuteness in detecting fallacious Pretences to it ; after Depth in useful Sciences, and above all an *early Knowledge of the holy Scriptures* — the younger Attendants upon the Instructions here offer'd should sit down contented with Accomplishments far more easily attainable : The original Records of our Holy Religion will in proportion be neglected : Its Evidences will lose much of their Clearness and Efficacy : Its genuine Doctrines and primitive Polity will be misunderstood : The Obligations It lays upon Its Professors to Unity in Faith and Communion in Worship will be little attended to ; whence Advantage will be taken, on one Hand to strain them too far by Those, who charge Us with Apostasy ; and to explain them quite away on the other by Those, who envy Us the Privileges of our Establishment. And, if ever those well-tryed Principles, upon which, while studied and understood, our National Church hath been most successfully defended, and hath hitherto been an impregnable Bulwark of the Reformation, should be laid aside and forgotten ; sound Learning and useful Science,

Science, and with them real Virtue and rational Piety, would (I am persuaded) soon give Way to Barbarism and Superstition:— That Superstition most probably, against which We profess to entertain the warmest Zeal; and against which our *Zeal* cannot well be too warm, if it be but exerted *according to Knowledge*.

Let me not here be misunderstood, as arrogantly accusing, where I only mean affectionately to caution. Sensible I am, that sober Industry, pursuing its Object in Silence and Solitude, is not always sufficiently careful to *let its Light so shine before Men, that they may see its good Works*: Whilst the undaunted Worthlessness of a Few *that are otherwise cannot be hid*; because they themselves will needs be *a proclaiming their own Folly to every one they meet, as they walk by the Way*. Never, I believe, were totally vicious Characters less frequent in *This Place* than at present. Yet, how happily soever We may have hitherto *escaped the Pollutions that are in the World*; it cannot be unseasonable to guard against the Infection of Its Levities and Follies: Nor will it (I trust) be thought a blameable Attempt, if I take Occasion, in a still more general View, to propose a modest Application of the Resolution in my Text, with a serious Enforcement of the Reasons on which it is founded.—“*I must work the Works of Him that sent me, while it is Day: The Night cometh, when no Man can work.*”

Not to detain You with any unnecessary Enlargement upon the Occasion of These Words,

a Eccl. X. 3.

or



or their Relation to the Context ; it may be proper just to observe, that they are the Declaration of our Blessed *LORD Himself* : And, as *He* was, in a peculiar Manner, *sanctified and sent into the World*, in order to perform such *Works* in it *as none other Man Did*, or could Do ; We are obliged to acknowledge concerning This His Declaration, in its highest Sense, that *never Man spake like This Man*. However, since He is pleased to argue from Principles, in which We are All of Us concern'd, We have the less Reason to think ourselves unconcern'd in the Use He makes of them. Something, no Doubt, there was, not only in the End of our LORD's Mission, and in the Nature of His Works, but in the Perfection of His whole Character, far beyond the Reach of our highest Attainments. And if, notwithstanding this, We are exhorted to *walk as He walked* : If, in particular, He hath by His Meekness in *Suffering left us an Example* : Well may We encourage one another to *follow His Steps, who went about Doing Good*, by a like Assiduity in *Working the Works of Him that hath sent Us also* : Especially since it is certain, that *upon Us too the Night is coming, when none of us will longer be able to work*.

The Words, thus apply'd, easily resolve themselves into the following Observations. — That We are All *sent into Life* by Almighty GOD : — That He sends us *to work*, not to be idle, *in it* : — That our Activity must be *regularly exerted* in working *His Works* : — That for *These* He allows us a *Day, or short Space of Time* only :



only : — And that, therefore, *while This lasteth*, we are concern'd to make the *best Use of it* we can ; lest *Night* overtake us, before our Task be finished. — Which well-known Truths I need only wish I could recommend to Your *attentive Recollection*, by Considerations in any Measure suited to their real and universal Importance. — But let us proceed to Particulars. And,

I. We are *Sent into Life* by Almighty GOD : We were *not born at all Adventures* ; We grow not up *by Accident* ; Nor are We, during our Abode here, at our own Disposal.

That We are SENT, is itself an awful Thought : And the Observation, how trite soever, may yet, I suppose, bear to be inculcated. For, whilst perhaps No-body doubts of it, Who is there that duly attends to, or properly applies, it ? Who is there that considers Life as a Trust committed to him ; and is not rather solicitous to find out some artful Expedient for passing the tedious Hours along with least Trouble, than studious to employ them with most Advantage ? Nay even of Those who, under the wise Direction of others, have happily contracted an early Liking for Business ; or who, from afterwards observing the Reputation and other Conveniences attending it, (Motives very proper as far as they go) make it their Choice to be employ'd rather than wholly idle ; how few are there who *work because they are Sent* : preferring a Life of Action upon a Principle of Conscience and Fidelity to *Him that sends them* ?

Yet

Yet such is the Case, and such ought to be the Sentiments, of every one of us. "That it is *GOD who hath made us, and not we ourselves,*" is an Assertion not the less worthy of Attention, because by daily Repetition rendered familiar to us. Or, if we will needs have it, that we were at first produced, and have since grown up, according to stated *Laws of Nature*, as they are called; Yet the most received Philosophy would teach us, that *These Laws* are *His Laws*, and that subordinate Agents perpetually derive from Him all their Efficiency. The *Oracles of GOD* constantly speak in the same Language. They ascribe our <sup>a</sup> *Make and Formation* to *JEHOVAH's Hands*. His <sup>b</sup> *Eyes did see our Substance yet being unperfect, and in His Book were all our Members written*. Had not *These day by day been fashioned* by His unerring Care, *as hidden, untimely Births we had not been*: Or, had not He, in this Sense also, *caused the Light to shine out of Darkness, the Day of Understanding had never dawned, nor its Day-star arisen in our Hearts*. To Him likewise we owe the Preservation as well as the first Grant of our Being, and all our Faculties: *Thro' Him have We been holden up ever since We were born; and by Him alone We escape Death*. Nay He challengeth to Himself not only the regular Productions in our Species, but even the seeming Deviations from His own Plan. <sup>c</sup> *Who hath made Man's Mouth?* saith He to His Servant *Moses; or who maketh the Dumb or Deaf, the Seeing or the Blind?* have not I, the *LORD*? And what-

<sup>a</sup> Ps. CXIX. 73.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. CXXXIX. 16.

<sup>c</sup> Exod. IV. 11.



ever wise Reasons there may be (as wise Reasons, no Doubt, there are) for those immature Births, imperfect Formations, or untimely Deaths, that are often permitted to fall under our Notice ; *One* important Purpose they certainly will serve, if they serve to remind us, that Birth, Perfection of Parts, Growth and Maturity, are not Things of Course, or such as depend solely upon uncontroll'd Natural Causes ; but are ultimately resolvable into *HIS* Good-Pleasure, *by whom We were at first fearfully and wonderfully made ; who continually holdeth our Souls in Life ; nay in whom We live, and move, and have our Being.*

*We are not, therefore, our own :* We received our Existence from *GOD, the GOD of the Spirits of all Flesh ;* and on Him We depend for every Moment's Continuance of it. And, as *our Time is in His Hand,* so is our Management of every Portion of it *noted in His Book.* He, who entrusts us with *This* and all our *Talents,* will assuredly one Day *come and reckon with us.* Our whole Frame and Constitution ; That Freedom of Agency, with which We feel ourselves endued ; That progressive State, whereof We are conscious ; That Apprehension We naturally have of a superiour Observer ; Above all, the Notices given us by our Judge Himself ; In short, all Things within, all Things without us, conspire in proclaiming, *That We must give an Account of ourselves to Him that sent us. —* *What Account* will be expected, might have been deduced from the foregoing Reflections, though my *Text* had not so clearly implied,

II. That

II. That We are *sent* into Life, *not to sit still* only, or to *take our Pastime therein*; but *to work* and be industrious, in order to our being useful in It.

For, if We are sent hither by a Being of infinite Wisdom, our Errand, We may be sure, must not only be worthy of His own Perfections, but suited to the Powers He hath given us, and the Situation in which He hath placed us. In particular: Do We find ourselves in a World, where every Species of Creatures about us is incessantly *fulfilling* our common Creator's *Word*? We cannot imagine, that He should intend or allow *Us* to be the *only idle* and unserviceable Parts of His Creation: Much less can We suppose Him, after *preparing us Bodies* admirably fitted for Action and Use, to leave us at Liberty to apply these exquisite Pieces of Workmanship either to no Use, or to such as is even worse than none: Least of all would He have *taught us more than the Beasts of the Earth, and made us wiser than the Fowls of Heaven*, for no other End, but that such superiour Endowments should be lost in an insignificant Round of *Sitting down to eat and to drink, and then Rising up to play*. And yet, of all this He hath given us still farther Intimation, by having made Action and Exercise not only the ordinary Means of improving our several Powers, but a necessary Condition of retaining them; by having placed no valuable Acquisition within the Reach of the lazy or the negligent; and (which may deserve some farther Illustration)



tion) by having exempted *no Season of Life, no Situation in Society, no State of Human Nature* itself, from every Sort of Engagement.

No *Season of Life* can be wholly excused from Business. — Confirmed Manhood is indeed that Portion of it, in which the Faculties, whether of Body or Mind, usually appear to be at their *best Estate*: *This* therefore is most fitted for such Undertakings as require a strenuous Exertion of the one or the other; and a dreadful Account must *They* have to give, by whom this important Part of Life hath been *vilely cast away* in inglorious Ease and Sensuality. However *This*, tho' the principal, is by no Means the only, Season for Labour and Action: Inactivity even in Childhood is unnatural; and, if Youth must generally be spent in preparing for the Offices of maturer Age; such preparatory Exercises are themselves *Works* of no small Pains and Assiduity, as well as of indispensable Necessity to render the remaining Stages of the Man's Journey through Life, either beneficial to his Fellow-Travellers, or even supportable to himself. Nay, as to more advanced Years; neither can These be absolutely discharged from attending upon Services of the gentler, but not less useful, Kind: so long as the Ignorance of Youth shall need Instruction, and its Impetuosity Restraint; or so long as the Operations of Man's Estate shall want to be directed, and sometimes also its Rashness to be moderated, by sober Advice and friendly Reprehension: In which respects, since *Men of Virtue and Piety shall bring forth*  
*more*

*more Fruit in their Age*; even gray Hairs must claim no Dispensation for Unprofitableness; so long as the Mind itself retains any Capacity for thus beneficially employing the Result of Its long Experience and Observation.

Neither can any *Station or Circumstances in Society* give a Release from Employment.—With Regard to the greatest Part of Mankind, the Point is evident: *These must in the Sweat of their Faces eat their Bread.* And, as to those Few in Comparison, whose Accommodation is more amply provided for; They also must, if They will preserve their Innocence and Virtue, or even their Health and Relish for any other Blessing, engage in some Occupation, or contrive some Exercise, for that Purpose; it being so ordered, in our very Constitution, that, *if Any Person will not work, neither shall he eat.* And yet, surely, fit Occasions for Working can nowhere be wanting, any more than Obligations to embrace them. The Management of a plentiful Fortune, and the Demands of an exalted Station, themselves call for no ordinary Degree of Vigilance or Activity: And where Works of Necessity are least pressing, Works of Piety and Humanity, of Friendship and Charity, will not fail the more strongly to solicit us. *The Poor we have always with us*; and They, whose Time lies most upon their Hands, *whenever they will, may* always commendably, and methinks agreeably, employ it in *doing them Good.* To all which let me add, what Men of Affluence and Dignity are much concerned to bear in Mind,  
That



That their Examples will be active, should They themselves be idle; or, at least, that their Lives, how trifling soever they may now be, will one Day be found to have no small Weight in increasing their Condemnation.

Nay, once more: No *Condition of Human Nature* ever was, ever will be, exempt from every Kind of Working. — Even the State of Innocence was by no Means a State of Inactivity. The Fall of our First Parents introduced Toil and Drudgery into our World, but found Industry already in it: For the *Dressing of the Garden* was, We know, *Adam's* Business, though not his painful Labour. And, if after Death *there remaineth a Rest for the People of GOD*; even This Rest is not a Freedom from Action, but only from Sin and, its never-failing Attendants, Weariness and Pain. *From such Labours They, that dye in the LORD, shall then rest*: But the *Works* of Contemplation and Love, of Adoration and Praise, *shall so follow them* as for ever to make a Part of their Exercise and their Happiness. — In short: In whatever Capacity we view Human Nature; whether in its Original Perfection or its present Degeneracy; whether in its present State of Discipline or its future State of Glory; We may pronounce concerning Idleness (what was long ago said of *Pride*) that *It was not made for Man*.

Were it needful or proper to dwell longer on so beaten a Topick, this despicable Vice might be exposed in every View, in which it can be considered, whether Natural, Moral, or Religious:

gious: As it debaseth our Nature, and sinks us below our Rank in the Scale of Beings: As it renders useless, and by Degrees extinguisheth, every good Quality in us; whilst it supplies Nourishment and Incentives to every bad one: As it indisposeth us towards every Duty, and lays us open to almost every Temptation: As it resists the wise Purpose of Providence in this World; and in the next, not only cuts off all Title to any Inheritance, but finally subjects us to the tremendous Doom of the *unprofitable Servant*. — If even an *Heathen Historian* could learn from Nature to count *that* Man's *Existence* alone worthy of the Name of *Living* or *Vital Enjoyment*, who is engaged in some *useful Art*, some *Undertaking* capable of transmitting his *Fame* to After-Times: Shall We *Christians* stand here all the Day idle, as if *No one* had hired us? We, who are bought with a Price of inestimable Value; and who are, as such, under peculiar Obligations to glorify GOD in our Body and in our Spirit; Both which are GOD's.

However, after all, it is not expected that every Moment of Men's Lives should be thus employed. Neither the Contexture of our Bodies, nor the Frame of our Minds, will endure to be perpetually upon the Stretch. Without seasonable Intervals of Relaxation, We must soon become incapable of Working: And, notwithstanding all our Care, Occasions there will be, either of bodily Indisposition, or Discomposure of Mind, or Both; when, (as We humbly hope) He, who knoweth whereof we are made, will not  
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be *strict to mark* our involuntary Intermiſſions, nor ſevere in calling us to Account for them. — But then, theſe very Deductions from our Time muſt greatly enhance the Value of the Remainder: The more of our precious Moments have been, or may be, ſunk in the needful Refreshment of our wearied Limbs, or the no leſs needful Recreation of our exhausted Spirits, the fewer can be ſpared for unneceſſary Amuſements; and the more ſtrictly are we obliged to improve to Advantage thoſe that may be yet in our Power: In this Senſe alſo, <sup>a</sup> *Re-deeming the Time, becauſe the Days are evil.*

On the other Hand, neither will every Kind of Employment be allowed in our Accounts, much leſs be admitted as rewardable. <sup>b</sup> *Many buſy Bodies there are, who, in the Eſtimation of an inſpired Apoſtle, work not at all, to any good Purpose: Such, in particular, are Tatlers and Talebearers, eſpecially in the cenſorious Way; impertinent Meddlers in other Men's Matters to the Neglect of their own Concerns; Movers of Sedition in Communities, and Sowers of Discord among Brethren.* And, if Activity thus employed can neither be *acceptable unto GOD nor approved of Men*; ſtill leſs ſo, if poſſible, muſt be the miſchievous Pains taken, in corrupting the Principles and debauching the Morals of Youth, by Factors for the Enemy of Mankind, and Companions of that Destroyer: Theſe and ſuch as Theſe, far from being owned by our LORD as having been engaged in His Service, will fi-

<sup>a</sup> Eph. V. 16.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Theſſ. III. 11.

nally be dismissed *into outer Darkneſs*, with — “ *I know You not:— Depart from me, All Ye Workers of Iniquity!* — Which brings me to obſerve,

III. That We muſt not only be active, but our Activity muſt be rightly directed, and regularly exerted: We muſt *work the Works of Him that ſent us*.

And, ſhould it now be aſked, in the Words of the *Jews* to our Bleſſed LORD, “ *What ſhall We Do, that We might work the Works of GOD?* ” I conceive, the general Answer may well include all lawful Occupations, all ſuch as *miniſter to the Neceſſities*, without *providing for the Luſts*, hurting the Perſons, or injuring the Properties, of ourſelves or others; eſpecially if they are undertaken with an habitual Purpoſe of ſerving our Creator by them, and carried on in Ways conformable to His Laws. Secular Employments, thus conſecrated, become not only allowable Means of Subſiſtence, but rewardable Inſtances of Duty. Indeed, *without theſe cannot a City be inhabited, nor the State of the World maintained*. So long, therefore, as Men proſecute them in their due Order, and in Methods conſiſtent with higher Obligations; ſo long are they commendably answering His Intention, who ſends them hither: And, by Parity of Reaſon, thoſe liberal Arts and learned Profeſſions, by which Perſons of more extenſive Knowledge are rendered more extenſively ſerviceable *in their Generations*, may juſtly be preſumed to be well-

<sup>a</sup> Job. VI. 28.

<sup>b</sup> Ecclus. XXXVII. 32, 34.



*pleasing to GOD, inasmuch as they are good and profitable unto Men.*

True indeed it is, that *Christianity* hath greatly enlarged and exalted our Views. Yet even this Divine Institution, which hath directed our *Affection* to *Things above*, hath not tied up our Hands from *Things on the Earth*. It permitted, if not required, those, to whom It first offered itself, to *abide in the same Callings, wherein they were called*. Nay we find *This* among St. Paul's Instructions to *Titus*, and in him to succeeding Governours of the Church, "<sup>b</sup> *Let Ours also learn to maintain Good Works for necessary Uses, that they be not unfruitful.*" When <sup>a</sup> *he that stole* is, by the same Apostle, admonished to *steal no more*, instead of being advised to fly from Temptations by *going out of the World*, he is directed to prevent or disarm them by provident *Labour, working with his Hands the Thing that is Good*. Safely therefore may We Christians reckon worldly Employments, so long as they are lawful ones, among those *good Works, which GOD hath ordained that We should walk in them*. And They, that walk in them through Life with Innocence and with Piety, need not doubt, but they are, after the Example of the good *Patriarchs, Walking with GOD*.

In some Occupation or other, then, every Member of Society ought to be engaged. But it should be observed farther that, as such Occupations are various, and as among them some must be more immediately incumbent on parti-

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. VII. 20.

<sup>b</sup> Titus III. 14.

<sup>c</sup> Eph. IV. 28.  
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cular Men than others; so Each Man's *Study* will always most commendably be exerted in *Doing that Business*, which is properly *his own*. What that is, will generally be pointed out by the special Talents, Opportunities, Stations, or Callings of the Persons concerned. \* *There are in the Body Civil*, as the Apostle hath observed concerning the Body Spiritual, *many Members*: And, since in *Neither* of these *Bodies* can *All Members have the same Office*, His following Exhortation may with great Propriety be accommodated to them Both. *Having Gifts differing according to the Grace given unto us; whether Prophecy, let us prophesy according to the Proportion of Faith; or Ministry, let us wait on our Ministering; or he that teacheth, on Teaching; or he that exhorteth, on Exhortation: He that giveth, let him do it with Simplicity; he that ruleth, with Diligence; he that sheweth Mercy, with Chearfulness.* — In short: *Whatsoever our Hand findeth to Do, whatsoever Business our proper Station sets before Us; We must not be slothful in it, but we must Do it with our Might.*

Give me Leave to bring home this important Point to Ourselves. For surely We of this Place also have *our* Employments; Employments of no small Moment, either to ourselves or to the Community: Of which, however, I as little need to specify the several Kinds, as to enumerate the peculiar Obligations we lye under to a faithful Discharge of them. — Whilst We daily walk upon the same Ground that was once trod;

a *Rom. XII. 4—8.*    b *Comp. Eccl. IX. 10. with Rom. XII. 11.*



whilst We occupy the Places that were formerly filled ; whilst We partake of the Bounty that was either exerted or enjoyed, by Men of distinguished Eminence in their Generations, and *the Glory of their Times* ; shall I add, whilst the Images of their Persons appear full in our View : Must *not our Hearts burn within Us*, fired with a generous Ardour after some Resemblance at least of their Excellences, and with a laudable Ambition of being in some Degree beneficial to, in some Degree respected by, those that come after *Us* ? And, need I observe to You, in the meanwhile, that They never acquired those Treasures of Learning, by means whereof they have enriched our publick Repositories, and made our Way to Science at once shorter and more agreeable, merely by *entering into other Men's Labours* through partial Extracts from them ; much less by *spending their Time in Nothing else*, but in perusing *some new Thing*, some hasty Production, which, like the *Prophet's Gourd*, *cometh up in a Night and perisheth in a Night* : But by retired Meditation and laborious Researches into those *secret Truths*, which *Wisdom sheweth to them only*, *who seek her early*, and *walk with her in solitary Paths*. And, if We expect to be blessed with the same Success ; to discharge the Offices, to which we may be called, with the same Reputation ; and, in particular, to adorn our holy Profession and defend Its Truths, with the same Abilities ; We also must, after their Example, *endure Hardness*, and *bear the Yoke, in our Youth* : We must, like them, *study to shew ourselves approved unto GOD*  
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and Man, if we hope to go forth from hence equally *sanctified and meet for the Master's Use, and alike prepared unto every good Work.*

Yet, after all; the *Work* of most indispensable Obligation, and in which, whatever our Situation or our Profession may be, we are most nearly concerned, is that of promoting our Creator's Glory, by setting forward the Salvation of others, and especially *making our own Calling and Election sure.* A Work, which, though It need not, must not ordinarily, supersede all the others, is yet, in Comparison with them, *the one Thing needful:* It is indeed *that Work*, for the sake of which chiefly *We came into the World*, and which if we leave undone, *good had it been for us that we had not been sent into it:* And yet a Work it is, not to be accomplished by a few slight Endeavours; or without *Striving, Giving Diligence, and Watching thereunto with all Perseverance.* The bare Learning of our Duty is a Work of no small Attention: How much more Pains, then, must be taken in the due Performance of it. To touch upon a single Branch of it only, That which more immediately relates to *Ourselves.* Here, the most untainted will find some Difficulty in subduing the irregular Tendencies of their carnal Part: Whilst a far greater Number, having (from a bad Education or for Want of a good one, from the Influence of ill Example or the Enticements of ill Company) made some Progress in a wrong Course of Life, must, besides the arduous Work of overcoming corrupt Inclinations, engage in the still  
more



more painful Task of extirpating vicious Habits. And All in general will find it Matter of constant Labour, though under Divine Grace of ever-increasing Pleasure, to rectify their Tempers and *purify their Hearts*; to *bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of CHRIST*; to raise their Affections unto a Relish for religious Exercises and spiritual Enjoyments; not only (in the Language of St. Paul,) to *put off the Old Man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful Lusts*; but to *put on the New Man, which after GOD is created in Righteousness and true Holiness*: — That *Holiness, without which no Man shall see the LORD*! — And yet,

IV. For all our Works, this last in particular, We have a *Day only, or short Time*, allowed us; after which *the Night cometh, when no Man can work*.

*This, in the most obvious Application, is the Day or Season of each Man's Life. And that, in this respect, the Night cometh upon every one of us, can (I suppose) need no Proof. Those Portions of Duration, with which we are here acquainted, roll on apace: And, whether this Rotation be near its own Conclusion or not, the Share that each of Us hath in it, as his own Time of Tryal, assuredly is so. In our easiest Moments there is but a Step between us and Death: And the oldest Man living may truly say, with the experienced Patriarch, "Few and evil have the Days of the Years of my Life been." Yet, no sooner will this short Life be closed, but*

an

an End must come of all such *Working*, as will be available to our everlasting Salvation: It being the uniform Doctrine of the inspired Writings, in some Places directly asserted, in all taken for granted, that <sup>a</sup> *every Man's* final Allotment will be *according to the Works done in his Body*.

And, as thus much is sufficient for the Purpose of the Observation now before us; so (by the Way) more than this, I presume, cannot be urged upon any clear Grounds of Holy Scripture. That <sup>b</sup> *there is, in the Grave, whither We are going, no such Work or Device as our Hands here find to Do, no such Wisdom or Knowledge as our present Situation engageth us in pursuit of; We allow and maintain: But it doth not follow, nor would the wise Preacher's Argument for Industry be at all enforced by supposing, that Death brings with it, not only a Cessation from Working, but a Privation of Thought and Perception of every Kind.—If our Expectations in a Future State be usually (for it must not be said, always) referr'd to the Day of general Retribution; this may well be accounted for by concluding, not that after Death no Degree of Comfort to the Good or of Uneasiness to the Bad shall take Place, but (which is readily admitted) that the Sentence upon Neither shall be publickly pronounced and fully executed, before that Great Day.—And, as to the Suggestion, “that the Person awaking at the last Day from such a total Sleep as is contended for, unconscious of any intervening Duration, will con-*

a 2 Cor. V. 10.

b Eccl. IX. 10.



ceive the Moment of his Resurrection to be *immediately* connected with the Moment of his Decease ;" neither will *this* obviate *all* the Scripture Passages usually alledged on the other Side. Hear only the memorable Declaration of St. Paul : " *What I should chuse, I wot not : For I am in a Strait betwixt two ; having a Desire to depart, and to be with CHRIST ; which is far better : Nevertheless, to abide in the Flesh is more needful for You.*" — The Alternative in the Apostle's View, You will observe, was *This* : Whether He should by *departing* become happy with CHRIST, or by *abiding in the Flesh* continue useful in the Church. And, to occasion any such Difficulty as is here represented, He must have understood, that his making Choice of the Latter of these Two Objects before him, would be no ordinary Instance of Self-denial in regard to the Former. Now, what Self-denial could there be in foregoing, for the present only, an Object at present not attainable nor expected by him ? The Apostle might have *chosen* to continue for many Years with His Beloved *Philippians*, for their *Furtherance and Joy of Faith*, without postponing for one Moment any such Enjoyment of his own as was not to commence before the general Judgment. Nor does it appear, how the *Strait*, He here declares himself in, can be accounted for ; or, how his Affection for his Converts can be viewed in that amiable Light, in which we now see it ; without supposing him fully assured, that the longer his

a *Phil. I. 22—25.*

Life

Life should be continued for their Benefit, just so much the longer He must be detained from what He here calls, "*Being with CHRIST* : And that the same Hour, that should remove him from *Them*, would put him in actual Possession of That *far better State*.

But, to return and proceed : There is a Day of *Health*, often yet shorter than that of *Animal Life*, but beyond which there seldom remains much Ability for Working to any considerable Purpose. A Reflection This, of great Moment ; and of which therefore We are frequently reminded. In fact, "*Slothfulness itself casteth into a deep Sleep* : Our Faculties through Disuse become indisposed, and by degrees unqualify'd, for any laudable Exertion ; till at last such an affected Inactivity terminates in a real Incapacity. The like Effect may also, in other Instances, be owing to the quite contrary Cause ; for We sometimes observe with Concern the seemingly firmest Constitutions totally enfeebled, or the brightest Faculties irrecoverably disordered, by an excessive Intensity of Application. And, where neither of these Extremes can be directly charged with the melancholy Change, the Supreme Disposer of all Things on some Occasions thinks fit (for Reasons always wise, tho' not always discernible by Us) to <sup>b</sup> *pour Contempt upon the Mighty* by *weakening their* bodily Strength ; or to *take away the Heart of the Chief of the Earth* in Intellectual Endowments, *causing them* (if I may use Holy *Job's* Expression) to

a *Prov.* XIX. 15.

b *Job* XII. 21, 24.



*wander in a Wilderness, where there is no Way. But, without pretending to distinguish the several Causes of such affecting Appearances, their Influence, in relation to every material Business of Life, is well known; and is surely a perpetual Call upon us to Remember our Creator and to finish His Works; while the evil Days come not, nor the Years draw nigh, when We shall say, "We have no Pleasure in them."*

Especially since farther, with regard to our principal Work, We have strong Intimations, that there is an *accepted Time, a Day of Salvation*; which may be closed before the Close of Life, or even the Loss of Natural Faculties. Not that sincere Repentance and real Reformation will ever come too late for Acceptance. *\* When the Wicked Man turneth away from his Wickedness, that he hath committed, and Doeth that which is lawful and right; We may pronounce upon the highest Authority, that He shall save his Soul alive.* But we have no Authority to pronounce, that *They may, at Pleasure, Do Good, who have been accustomed to Do Evil*: Or, that such as have long been *sinning wilfully* shall presently be *renewed again unto Repentance*, upon their vouchsafing to cast a Thought that way. Reasoning by Analogy from similar Cases leads us toward a different Conclusion. We see almost daily Examples, wherein mere Sorrow, and even ardent Wishes, nay real Endeavours, are found insufficient to repair a Man's Fortune, or to restore his Health, when once wasted and

<sup>a</sup> *Ezek. XVIII. 27.*

destroyed

destroyed by Riot and Extravagance. And, if such Methods are thus unable to set all right in Men's Temporal Concerns; What wise Man would reduce himself to a Necessity of trying their Success in an Affair of infinitely greater Moment; or of relying on their Efficacy, not only for removing all the Consequences of a Life of Sin, but for securing the Rewards of a Life of Holiness? The Truth is, Repentance itself is no such easy Matter as seems to be too commonly supposed. The Completion of it at least, if not the first Motion towards it, is certainly *the Gift of GOD*. And, how can the habitual Sinner presume, that *the Spirit of GOD should always strive with Him*? Why should he not rather apprehend, that the Time may soon come, when, though he should become <sup>a</sup> *willing to inherit the Blessing* he hath *profanely despised*, his Pretensions shall be *rejected*? not because real Repentance would even then be unavailable, supposing him capable of it; but because he shall then *find no Place of Repentance, tho' he should cry for it earnestly with Tears*.

Upon the Whole. We are sent into Life by our great Creator: Upon an Errand of indispensable Necessity: To be accomplished, if at all, within a Space of Time, short at best, and yet uncertain also; not only in respect of its Continuance, but of our Ability to make a proper Use of it.—What remains then, but that, agreeably to our LORD's Declaration in my *Text*, and to the *last* Observation above deduced from it,

<sup>a</sup> Comp. *Heb. XII. 17.* with *Gen. XXVII.*



V. We should, All of Us, resolve to prosecute This Great Business *while it is Day*; *lest the Night* should overtake us, before our Work be finished.

Could the Night of Death justly be considered as the Period, not of our-Working only, but of our very Being; the Libertine's Conclusion, "*Let us Eat and Drink*," unmanly as it is, would hardly be more unmanly than his Principle, "*To-morrow We dye*." But, in how very different a Light must the Certainty and Nearness of Death appear, when an ETERNITY of Happiness or Misery is understood to depend upon the Life preceding it. — If We All dye only to live again: If the *Night* of Death is to be succeeded by a *new Day*, whose Sun shall no more go down: If, after our Bodies have *slept in the Dust*, We must All *awake*; Some to *everlasting Life* and *Glory*, and Some to *Shame and everlasting Contempt*: If, once more, We must then be irreversibly sentenced to the One or the Other of these most opposite Conditions, from the Character We shall by an unerring Judge be found to have sustained here, either of *faithful Stewards* or of *unprofitable Servants*: Who can express the Infatuation of *consuming those Years in Vanity*, or of drowning in Sensuality those Faculties; by our Application of which our Situation must be determined, in a Life endless and a State unchangeable!

Let us think betimes, how amazing the Approach of Death must appear — far more amazing

zing than the Approach of Night to an improvident *Traveller*, who has a great Part of his laborious but necessary Day's Journey still to be performed—*should* the Business of our Lives prove *then* unfinished; but especially, should it hardly be well begun. In our early Years, indeed, while the Circulations are free, and the Spirits brisk, Time may glide along with tolerable Smoothness in a Course of unthinking Gayety. The *Young Man* may rejoice in his Youth, and let his Heart cheer him: He may, for some Time, walk in the Ways of his Heart, and in the Sight of his Eyes; indulging himself without Reserve in the Gratification of every Sense and Appetite. But — *the Voice of the LORD GOD* will be heard in the Cool of the Day: And, when the Remonstrances of Conscience begin to force themselves upon him; what must his *Searchings of Heart* be! whether he looks back upon a World, out of which he is just going, without having seriously engaged in *any one Work* for which he was sent into it; or whether he looks forward into Another, upon which he is just entering, without having provided *any one* requisite *Qualification* for it; and in which he must know, that for all *These Things*, all the Hours he has trifled away, all the Talents he has misemploy'd, *GOD* will bring him to Judgment!

Or supposing, what is at all Times possible, at no Time improbable, that the *King of Terrors*, instead of making leisurely Advances, and notifying his Approach, should unawares seize the *Strong Man* and overcome him: Should the  
worthless



worthless Voluptuary's Soul be this Night required of him, or he be deprived of that Understanding, which he hath so wretchedly misused: Under how much greater Astonishment must he awake in the *World of Spirits*, an entire Stranger as he is to Spiritual Joys, and utterly incapable of *intermeddling with*, or bearing any Part in them! What Heart can conceive the Anguish, with which the Man of Wit and Parts, or of Wealth and Dignity, after a Life of Indolence and Insignificancy, especially if also of Lewdness and Impiety, shall see the industrious Peasant whom he hath perhaps oppressed, or the plodding Student whom he hath probably held in Contempt, *sitting down hereafter in the Kingdom of Heaven, and himself for ever thrust out!*

Whereas, on the other Hand, in the Evening of a Life spent in *Doing his LORD's Will*, with what Serenity may the faithful Servant wait for *His Coming*; in constant Readiness to *open to Him immediately*, and in humble Confidence that *his Reward is with Him, and his Work before Him*. In other Instances, it may be some little Discouragement to Industry, to observe the Success of Men's Labours not always answerable to the Constancy of them. Disappointments of this Sort must often happen in *worldly Pursuits*; where, of *Many that may run, but One can ordinarily receive the Prize*. But, in the great Race that is set before Us Christians, the Case is far otherwise. We may *here* be Competitors without Interference; and, though We *All run*, We may *each of Us obtain*. — We serve a Master,

ter, by whom well-meaning Merit (and with Him sincere Endeavours are *accepted for Merit*) shall not alway be forgotten; And in whose Work if We are but <sup>a</sup> *steadfast and unmoveable*, and to the best of our Abilities *always abounding*, our Labour shall, in no Degree of it, finally be in vain. Let us <sup>b</sup> *work our Work betimes*; and in His Time He, by whom We are employed, will assuredly give Us our full Reward.

I have only to add, what must not be omitted in treating this Subject, that *our own Strength is small*: So small, as to be of itself utterly disproportioned either to the Difficulty of the Work, or the Excellency of the Reward, proposed to us. In Truth, <sup>c</sup> *it is GOD that worketh in us, both to Will and to Do, of His Good Pleasure*. But then, since it is always His Good Pleasure to assist as well as to reward *them that diligently seek Him*; so far should the foregoing Reflection be from damping our Resolution, or excusing our Inactivity, that it is at once a most awful and most animating Incitement to *work out our own Salvation with Fear and Trembling*.

If Any of You, then, lack Wisdom, let him ask of GOD: To HIM let us All apply ourselves for Guidance and Support through this arduous Undertaking: Humbly beseeching Him, that He would *turn away our Eyes, lest with Appetite or Eagerness they behold Vanity, and quicken us in His Way*: That He would *strengthen our Hands, and prosper the Work of them*: That, in this Place

a 1 Cor. XV. 58.

b Ecclef. LI. 30.

c Phil. II. 12, 13.  
more



more especially, He would sanctify all our Studies, to the Attainment of that *Knowledge*, not which *puffeth up one against another*, but which *maketh charitable* to the *Edifying* of our Brethren, and *wise unto* our own *Salvation*: That *all our Works* may be *begun, continued, and ended in Him*: And that at length, when *the Time of our Departure is at hand*, We may, by His Mercy overlooking whatever hath been amiss in us, and through the Merits of our Redeemer supplying what is wanting on our Parts, Each of us be able to address Him, in the Words of the same His well-beloved Son:—<sup>a</sup> “*I have glorified Thee on the Earth: I have finished the WORK, which THOU gavest Me to Do!*”

<sup>a</sup> *John XVII. 4.*

F I N I S.

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